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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: MARR PGOV PREL RS UP WTO

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: LOW-KEY REACTION TO DUMA STATEMENT ON  
NATO/BLACK SEA FLEET

REF: A. MOSCOW 1568

¶B. 07 KYIV 3101

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The June 4 Russian Duma statement calling for termination of the 1997 Ukraine-Russia Friendship Treaty in response to Ukrainian NATO membership has elicited relatively restrained responses in Kyiv. President Yushchenko, on the eve of his departure for the CIS Summit in St. Petersburg, noted Ukraine's respect for the Russian nation and people and characterized as a mistake any move to revise the strategic partnership as enshrined in the Friendship Treaty. PM Tymoshenko characterized the Duma action as "inadequate" and Rada faction leader Volodymyr Lytvyn saw it as "an emotional statement" that should be addressed through an inter-parliamentary meeting. The latest salvo of exchanges on NATO membership was triggered by President Yushchenko's May 20 decree ordering, in preparation for the 2017 expiration of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) basing agreement, a draft act on termination of the bilateral agreements governing the BSF basing in Crimea. An MFA statement characterized the draft act as a legal requirement in the process leading to termination of the agreements. End Summary.

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Restrained Response

¶2. (SBU) While the Duma statement generated a flurry of critical popular press, the response from government leaders has been relatively restrained. President Yushchenko, preparing for the CIS Summit in St. Petersburg and his initial meeting with President Medvedev, emphasized that he considered the bilateral relationship with Russia to be a "strategic partnership that is enshrined in the Friendship Treaty." He characterized as a political mistake any action that tried to "revise" the relationship, and stressed Ukraine's "high respect for the Russian nation and Russian people." Yushchenko reiterated that Ukraine was a sovereign state that would build its foreign policy and security relationships based on national interest, while restating his guarantee (as per the Constitution) that no foreign military bases would be stationed on Ukraine's territory.

¶3. (SBU) PM Tymoshenko called the Duma action "inadequate," noting that "every radical step simply worsens the situation between our countries." She underlined that her government was working to maintain good cooperation with Moscow, moving into soccer diplomacy mode by adding that all of Ukraine had supported the St. Petersburg based club Zenit in its UEFA cup win. Rada faction leader Volodymyr Lytvyn characterized the Duma statement as "emotional", calling for an inter-parliamentary discussion of differences and noting that NATO membership was not a near-term possibility in any event.

Statements from other political leaders have balanced between irritation at the Duma action and calls for calm dialogue. Former PM and current opposition leader Yanukovych, currently in Moscow and reportedly meeting with

President Medvedev and PM Putin, has not reacted publicly.

Continued Push on BSF Removal

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¶4. (SBU) Yushchenko and FM Ohryzko have continued to push hard on the BSF basing issue, leading to delivery in mid-April 2008 of a memorandum to the Russian MFA outlining timelines and measures to insure withdrawal of the BSF by the May 2017 agreement deadline. The MFA posted a statement on May 24 outlining the reasons for President Yushchenko's decree, noting in particular the legal need for an act terminating the respective agreements governing basing and emphasizing that Ukraine was not considering extension of the agreement. The inclusion of language that precluded the possibil